Santa Clara
UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost
Pilot Program: Guidelines on Sources of Funding for Postdoctoral Fellows and Research Assistants (AY2026-2029)

Background

Section 8 of the University's Guidelines for Budgeting and Financial Management of Current Operations states that internal research grants may not be used to fund faculty and staff salaries or other pay. Recognizing that the College and a number of Schools use operating funds to create research-based startup grants as a faculty recruitment tool, the academic deans have requested greater flexibility in how these startup grants may be used. In response, the Provost and the Vice President for Finance and Administration have developed draft guidelines that would permit academic deans to use operating funds, on a limited basis, to fund postdoctoral fellowships or postbaccalaureate research opportunities. The draft guidelines are provided below.

Appointment Types

The draft guidelines apply to the funding of the following categories of appointments as outlined in the Faculty Handbook.

Postdoctoral Fellows (Section 3.1.2.3.2): A postdoctoral fellow holds an academic year appointment primarily to engage in research. During the period of the appointment, the fellow shall work under the direction of a tenured or tenure-track faculty mentor to receive advanced training and develop a research and publication record. Fellows shall not teach more than four courses in one academic year. The appointment is usually for one year and in no case more than three.

Junior Research Assistant (Sections 4.1.1.1) and Research Assistant (Section 4.1.1.2): Junior Research Assistants and Research Assistants are individuals who, under the supervision of a more experienced researcher, perform research tasks and assist with research.

Length of Appointment

A tenure-track faculty member may request to use their research-based startup package to fully fund a postdoctoral fellow, junior research assistant, or research assistant for up to 24 months. Funding beyond two years would need additional approval from the Dean and from the Provost Office. For postdoctoral fellows specifically, a summer appointment may be added to the academic year appointment to ensure continuity during their period of employment up to 24 months.

Postdoctoral Fellow or Research Assistant Responsibilities

The job duties will be developed by the faculty member in consultation with the Dean's Office, and should be consistent with the job duties outlined in the Faculty Handbook, taking into consideration the time required to effectively execute their expected teaching load. Job descriptions for both postdoctoral fellows and research assistants must be reviewed by Human Resources to determine compensation prior to posting the position.

Faculty Mentor Responsibilities
The faculty member is expected to provide mentorship, professional development, and publication opportunities to the postdoctoral fellow or research assistant.

Source of Funds
Schools may use operating funds to support a 1.0 FTE postdoctoral fellow or research assistant for up to 24 months.

Should a School wish to draw on its reserves to fund a postdoctoral fellow or research assistant, it must seek approval through the annual University Budget process.

Approval Process
Faculty interested in using their research-based startup package to support a Research Assistant should submit a proposal to the Dean describing the appointment request, length of appointment, job duties, mentoring plan, and recruitment strategy. For appointments longer than 24 months, the proposal must also identify a second funding source. Proposals will be reviewed and approved by the Dean.

Faculty using research startup funds for a Postdoctoral Fellow must submit a proposal and mentoring plan to the Office of Research for review, and then the Dean's Office for final review. The proposal should detail the appointment length, job duties, mentoring plan, and recruitment strategy. For appointments longer than 24 months, the proposal must also identify a second funding source. The mentoring plan should align with NSF guidelines to outline professional development and mentorship strategies for scholarship and teaching (if applicable). Following Dean approval, the mentoring plan undergoes review by the Office of Research. Positions with teaching duties must be planned with the Department Chair to fit academic scheduling and hiring timelines.